

Intro to Harmonized Thirds and Sixths

A melodic line harmonized in 3rds is a familiar sound to anyone who has heard, say, Van Morrison's *Brown Eyed Girl* or the intro to CSNY's *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*. You can start to develop some fluency with this device by harmonizing the major scale on adjacent strings. For example, the TAB below shows the C major scale harmonized in 3rds on the first two strings. On these strings, whenever your fingers are two frets apart you are playing a *minor* 3rd (one and a half steps); adjacent frets give you a *major* 3rd (two whole steps). These intervals are indicated below the staff: "M" for major and "m" for minor.

C major scale harmonized in 3rds. 1st and 3rd strings.

	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E
	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
T	0	1	3	5	7	8	10	12
A	1	3	5	6	8	10	12	13
B								
	M	m	m	M	M	m	m	M

The sequence of major and minor 3rds you see above is worth noting because it always holds true, no matter what the key or which strings you are using. If you have worked on the sequence of diatonic chords in a major key before – I is major, ii is minor, iii is minor, etc. – note that the two sequences are identical. That's because each pair of notes could be seen as the root and 3rd of those chords.

So long as you start with the tonic and 3rd degree of a major scale, the finger pattern you see in the top diagram will work for any pair of adjacent strings except for the 2nd and 3rd. Since the latter are tuned in a different interval the sequence looks a bit different on them, as shown in the TAB to the right in G major.

G major scale harmonized in 3rds. 2nd and 4th strings.

	B	C	D	E	F#	G	A	B
	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
T	0	1	3	5	7	8	10	12
A	0	2	4	5	7	9	11	12
B								

Inverted 3rds become 6ths

Harmonized 6ths are made up of the same notes as 3rds, but the notes have been flipped. Because this interval is much wider than thirds they are usually played on non-adjacent strings as shown in the Tab below. (Theory buffs note: when an interval is inverted in this way, major intervals become minor and vice versa.)

C major in 6ths. 2nd and 4th strings.

	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E
T	1	3	5	6	8	10	12	13
A	2	3	5	7	9	10	12	14
B								

G major in 6ths. 1st and 3rd strings.

	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
	B	C	D	E	F#	G	A	B
T	3	5	7	8	10	12	14	15
A	4	5	7	9	11	12	14	16
B								

Relating 3rds and 6ths to chords

For practical purposes you'll want to be able to see (and hear) how 3rds and 6ths relate to chords. One useful insight in this regard is that every chord in a major key shows up twice in the sequence of 3rds, as illustrated in the upper diagram to the right. For every chord of C major, there are two pairs of notes indicated: the notes to the left of the chord are its root and 3rd; those to the right are its 3rd and the 5th.

Over a 7th chord you have at least two more points of consonance. The lower diagram to the right shows how various pairs of notes from the C major scale relate to that key's V7 chord, G7.